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RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 3980  
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 2250  
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0311  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0926  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1020  
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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L TASHKENT 000267

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DEPT FOR SCA/CEN AND DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/28/2018

TAGS: PHUM PGOV PREL UZ

SUBJECT: AUTHORITIES REPORTEDLY OFFER SANJAR UMAROV FREEDOM  
IN EXCHANGE FOR TELEVISED CONFESSION

REF: A. TASHKENT 211  
    1B. TASHKENT 254  
    1C. TASHKENT 236

Classified By: POLOFF R. FITZMAURICE FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D)

11. (C) On February 28, poloff met with opposition Free Farmers Party leader and Sunshine Coalition member Nigara Khidoyatova to discuss what she had described as a recent development in the case of Sunshine Coalition leader Sanjar Umarov, who was imprisoned in March 2006 on politically-motivated charges of tax evasion and illegal commodities trading. Khidoyatova reported being approached on February 25 by an unknown individual, who introduced himself as "Bakhtiyor" (and whom she assumed was a National Security Service officer) and informed her that authorities were willing to amnesty Umarov in exchange for having him confess and apologize for his alleged crimes on Uzbek television (Comment: Authorities routinely ask inmates to sign written confessions in return for being granted amnesty, but poloff is unaware of any incidents where authorities have demanded that such confessions be televised. End comment). According to Khidoyatova, "Bakhtiyor" gave her a deadline of February 29 to make a decision, but she immediately told him that she was in no position to make any such decision on behalf of Umarov. She speculated that authorities were unable to convince Umarov to make the televised confession, and were now trying to convince his family and associates to pressure Umarov into accepting such a deal.

12. (C) Earlier on February 14, Khidoyatova had told poloff that Umarov's health continues to deteriorate in prison, noting that his son had seen bruises on his father's face during a meeting in early February (ref A). Umarov was included on the list of 23 prisoners of conscience that the Ambassador and DCM simultaneously presented to the Ministries of Foreign and Internal Affairs on February 26 (ref B).

...OR WAS UMAROV OFFERED FREEDOM IN RETURN FOR EXILE?

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13. (C) On February 20, the independent Ferghana.ru website, quoting "sources close to Umarov," stated that authorities

offered to free Umarov if he agreed to immediately leave Uzbekistan upon his release (ref C). On February 28, Khidoyatova said that she was told the same information on February 10 by Uzmetronom editor Sergei Yezhkov, who heard the story from law enforcement contacts (Comment: Yezhkov has admitted in the past being fed information by National Security Service contacts. However, in this case, Yezhkov did not report on his website the offer allegedly made to Umarov. End comment.) After talking to Yezhkov, Khidoyatova said that she had then passed on the information to others, including Umarov's son Gulam, who lives in the United States.

Indeed, Gulam told a similar story to the desk, and he also said that the NSS invited a family member in to discuss the case. Gulam said it was very unusual for this to happen. He took it as a good sign, but did not have very high expectations.

¶4. (C) Noting the discrepancies in the two stories, Khidoyatova dismissed the Ferghana.ru report as "old news," noting that Bakhtiyor had approached her only a few days ago.

She believed that the government would release Umarov in exchange for the televised confession, but she also doubted that Umarov would accept such an offer. She further noted that authorities have continued to deny Umarov's lawyer access to his client.

COMMENT

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¶5. (C) It is impossible to confirm Khidoyatova's story or the Ferghana.ru report, either of which could be true, but which should also both be taken with a grain of salt. Nevertheless, given all the noise regarding Umarov lately, something appears to be afoot, and it is quite possible that

the government may be considering granting amnesty to Umarov on some basis. A refusal by Umarov to confess to his alleged crimes could explain why he remains in prison (we also have heard unconfirmed reports that Mutabar Tojiboyeva has not yet been amnestied because she refuses to make such a confession). We will continue to raise his case, and those of other political prisoners, in our discussions with government officials.

NORLAND